

VZCZCXYZ0011
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAE #0412/01 2321445
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 191445Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9853
INFO RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 3075
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1633
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1810
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

S E C R E T ASMARA 000412

NOFORN

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/ICI/CI,
DS/IP/SPC/SO, DS/TIA/PII, AF/E, AF/EX

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/19/2028

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [APER](#) [AMGT](#) [KSOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: GSE ARRESTS EMBASSY LOCAL GUARD AT HIS RESIDENCE

REFS: A. ASMARA 000371

[1](#)B. 07 ASMARA 000894

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Embassy Local Guard Force (LGF) Commander Mehari Zemhret was arrested at his residence on 08/18/08 at approximately 1300 hrs while on his lunch break by members of the Eritrean National Security Agency (ENSA). An unidentified Eritrean male asked if "Mehari" was in the residence. Since more than one person named Mehari lives in the compound, Zemhret's wife asked "which one?" The unidentified male said "the one that works at the American Embassy." Zemhret walked to the compound gate and two unidentified ENSA males exited from a red Toyota and took him into custody. Zemhret's neighbors told FSNI that the car had been circling Zemhret's street for approximately 3 hrs earlier that day. FSNI went to several police stations and found out Zemhret was being held at the 5th police station in southern Asmara, approximately 300 meters from the RSO residence, but was unable to speak with him. Neither the ENSA personnel at Zemhret's house, nor the officials at the police station stated why Zemhret was arrested.

[1](#)2. (C) Zemhret had not conducted his compulsory military service, but had completed military service in Ethiopia where he was born. However, Zemhret is an ethnic Eritrean whose family returned to Eritrea after Eritrea gained independence in 1991. NOTE: In the last year, several LGF have been arrested in roundups for national service, but they have always been arrested when caught in roundups in downtown Asmara or while attending unsanctioned Protestant church services. They were not singled out, but were arrested with other non-Embassy Eritreans in public venues. None of the LGF thus far have been specifically targeted and arrested at their residence. END NOTE.

[1](#)3. (C) In September, 2006, the former LGF Commander Sirak Asmelash was arrested in a similar manner. While leaving his house at approximately 0740 hrs three men from the ENSA were waiting outside his house, arrested him, put him in a red Toyota, and transported him to the 5th police station. Asmelash was held at the police station for two weeks and was

repeatedly interrogated about his work at the embassy. He served 10 months of military service before being released.

¶4. (C) Reftel A previously reported on former locally engaged staff member Daniel Haile who was forced to resign his position as the radio/telephone technician after members of the Eritrean ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) told him he could no longer work at the U.S. Embassy. Post reported this incident might have been revenge by a former LGF Commander Isaac Abraham who was fired in February, 2008 for malfeasance and blamed Haile for his termination. Along with Abraham, six other LGF have been fired over the last six months for dereliction of duty. One of the LGF that was fired is now a receptionist at one of the PFDJ offices in Asmara.

¶5. (S/NF) Post has previously reported it assumes the vast majority of its LES staff are co-opted or coerced into reporting on Embassy activities to the Government of the State of Eritrea, (GSE). The GSE is extremely paranoid of diplomats and closely monitors foreigners in addition to their own populace. In November, 2007, Post RIF'd 12 persons as a downsizing measure since Post's DH American population has decreased. At that time, RSO Source reported the Eritrean MFA met about these firings and wanted to know if these 12 persons were targeted because Post believed they were providing information about Embassy activities to the GSE, (Reftel B).

¶6. (S/NF) POST COMMENTS: Post is not sure if the fired LES members are using their influence with the PFDJ to target Embassy LES they believe responsible for their firing and exacting revenge against Post by having key personnel terminated. It is very possible some of the LES staff that have been fired over the last year were the "embassy kingpins" who provided information to the GSE on Post activities and the GSE is targeting individuals who have not reported to the GSE or trying to hurt Embassy operations to avenge the firing of their contacts within the Embassy. Both Zemhret and Asmelash were 39 years old when they were arrested. The mandatory, national service is a minimum of two years. The cutoff age for males to start their national service is 40 years. Post continues to monitor the situation with LGF Commander Zemhret and will report any additional information. Point of contact is RSO Sean McClanahan, IVG: 596-2778.

TABLER-STONE